1950-78

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

THE FIRST AND SECOND

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Notes on the Drafts

ON the platform at the new Gettysburg Cemetery grounds, November 19, 1863, President Lincoln, turning from the faintly applauding crowd, said to Marshall Lamon who had presented him not five minutes before: "Lamon, that speech won't scour. It is a flat failure." The world has not affirmed his judgment. The deeds of those who gave their lives on Gettysburg field and on all the fields of war where men have died that the Nation might live, are consecrated by this the best and best remembered expression of America.

There are five known copies in President Lincoln's handwriting of the Gettysburg address. The original and second drafts were given by the President to his secretary, John Hay. On April 11, 1916, they were presented to the Government of the United States by Colonel Hay's three children, and have since been treasured in the custody of the Library of Congress.

That Lincoln wrote the address on a rough bit of paper on the way to Gettysburg is an exploded but persistent legend. Actually, the first sheet of the first draft was written in Washington, on Executive Mansion stationery. The corrections and the second page were written in lead pencil, probably at Judge Wills' house in Gettysburg, where Lincoln spent the night of the 18th.

The second draft is believed to be the reading copy which Mr. Lincoln held in his hand at the dedication ceremony, and is assumed to have been written on the morning of the 19th, between breakfast and the start for the cemetery grounds. There are a number of changes from the first version, some of them slight matters of punctuation, or of a single word—a "that nation" and a "this nation" for "the nation," "consecrated" for "hallowed," "but" for "while," and the like. Lincoln's eye evidently strayed in copying, for "We have come" of the first version was changed to "We are met," then crossed out and the original form restored above it. The first important change is "those who here gave their lives" instead of "those who died here." The sentence, "This we may, in all propriety do." became "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this." The entire beginning of the first draft's third paragraph is rephrased. Instead of "It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us" ["we here be dedicated" had been corrected in pencil above the scratched-out "to stand here"] Lincoln added a parallel sentence: "It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—"

In delivering the address Lincoln omitted—perhaps forgot—the word "poor," which had been put in above the phrase "in our power," in the second draft, and added, in the last sentence, the solemn phrase "under God." Both these changes are retained, and a few further slight alterations made in the "careful and deliberate revision" which Lincoln used in his later autograph copies, the third written for Edward Everett, and the fourth and fifth, the "Bancroft" and "Bliss" autographs, for sale at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Fair in Baltimore, April 1864.

Executive Mansion,

Washington, ... , 186 .

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal"

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow, this ground — The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.

It is rather for us, the living, ~~to stand here~~ here be dedicated,

First Draft of The Gettysburg Address

tea to the great task remaining before us—
that, from these honored dead we take in-
creased devotion to that cause for which
they here gave the last full measure of de-
votion—that we here highly resolve these
dead shall not have died in vain; that
the nation, shall have a new birth of free-
dom, and that government of the people by
the people for the people, shall not per-
ish from the earth.

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Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather

Second Draft of The Gettysburg Address

for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to ~~the~~ that cause for which they here gave ~~gave~~ the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

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